

TAJIKISTAN

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Capital: Dushanbe

GDP per capita (PPP): \$1,140 (2000 est.)

Population: 6,578,681 (July 2001 est.)

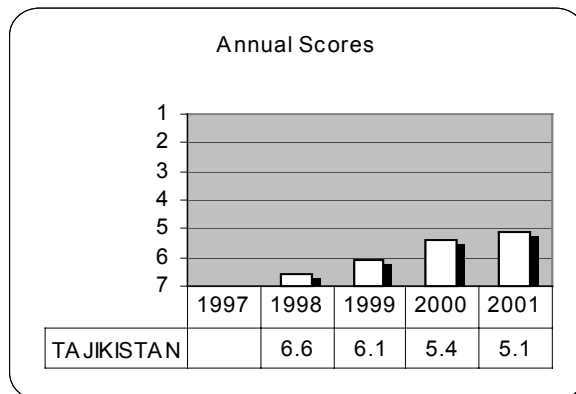
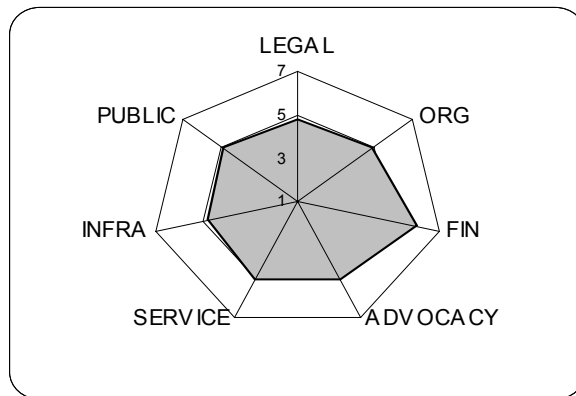
Foreign Direct Investment: \$19,000,000

Inflation: 33% (2000 est.)

Unemployment: 5.7% (December 1998)
(includes only officially registered unemployed)

OVERALL RATING: 5.1

NGOs in Tajikistan have developed to the point where they are beginning to enjoy some recognition by the government as a significant phenomenon in society. The continuing economic crisis and the inability of the government to resolve problems in the social sector have helped NGOs get established and provided favorable conditions for NGOs to demonstrate their ability to solve minor community problems. At best, the attitude of the government toward NGOs remains neutral: authorities do not actively assist NGOs in their development and activities, yet at the same time they welcome NGO initiatives and collaborate, especially at the lower levels of the state structure. NGOs have succeeded in having a policy impact in several cases where decisions of city authorities directly or indirectly affected the interests of their beneficiaries. One significant example was the proposed closure of a Dushanbe market, in that would have undermined the small credit program of an NGO. The NGO applied to the city government and persuaded it to postpone the closure until the small credit program had ended.



LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.8

An important positive change since the last year came in the form of a reduced fee for the registration of NGOs - \$25 for a local NGO and lower fees for national and international NGOs. Also, NGOs do not have to apply for registration to

Ministry of Justice in Dushanbe – they can register at regional and district Departments of Justice. Tajik government officials at various levels are slowly acquiring a familiarity with NGOs, their work, and the possible benefits of their

activities for society and the state. With this evolutionary rise in familiarity comes an easing of the automatic confrontation and hostility toward NGOs that has generally been the hallmark of Soviet-style bureaucratic structures. This can in part be attributed to the work of Counterpart Consortium Civil Society Support Centers, which have been working with officials at the local, regional and central government levels to bring about changes in the government's attitudes toward NGOs.

However, the legislation's definition of NGOs is not perfect. The law does not distinguish between political parties, religious, charitable and other organizations. Political parties, for example, are included by the state in the same list with NGOs, nor does the legislation provide clear regulations for NGO finances. Some activities of NGOs are currently regulated by presidential decrees, rather than by legislation. The state has not yet

banned or closed any NGO, but there is no law to protect NGOs from such action.

While the current Law on Public Associations is not restrictive, NGO activities are nevertheless censored and constrained. NGOs can criticize the state at high levels (the government, politicians, parliamentarians, etc.), though criticism of the President is not tolerated. Often such criticism would be understood and taken into account. Similar criticism of lower-level authorities, however, will often result in administrative repression and punishment, such as numerous inspections by tax and other structures.

There are very few lawyers familiar with NGO law. Most of those lawyers who are familiar with the operations of civil society organizations are associated with law-related NGOs (concentrated in Dushanbe).

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.0

Strategic planning by Tajik NGOs is virtually non-existent. The goals and objectives of most NGOs change according to the priorities of potential donors. Many NGOs define their mission in rather vague terms, which allows them to be very flexible and increasing their chances for funding by appealing to a broad spectrum of funder interests. The management structures of many NGOs is nominally democratic and professional, but in reality management boards frequently consist of relatives, and decisions are authoritarian. With few exceptions, there is little transparency in decision making and in accounting practices. The number of

NGOs that can afford permanent staff is growing but the majority hire personnel on a project-by-project basis. Leading NGOs have a permanent core staff (5-10% of all NGOs). Most NGOs cannot afford to access the Internet due to the high cost of logging on. The price of equipment, communications and technical services is beyond the reach of most NGOs. However, improving relationships with state authorities has led, in some cases, to at least moral support from the government, making it easier for NGOs to lease premises and establish communications, such as getting phone numbers, etc.

TAJIKISTAN

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.0

The economic depression in Tajikistan makes NGOs dependent on international donors. Local resources are extremely limited. Offers of non-financial assistance are common, but not necessarily always sought by NGOs. Free local support in the form of volunteers is more widely available during summer months when students are on vacation, but volunteerism as a concept is just beginning to gain acceptance among NGOs. The government is willing to contribute to NGO activities with non-financial resources – sometimes a significant portion of a project's resources are offered by the authorities.

Proper accounting systems need to be introduced. To date, no public reports have been published by Tajik NGOs.

This lack of transparency is explained by a combination of factors including security, traditional societal norms, etc.

A law on audits was recently adopted, but the professional level of local auditors is low. NGOs welcome audits by international auditors, but are cautious with regard to the skills and professionalism of local auditors.

Potential support from local private sources is hindered by the lack of appropriate legislation. Very few NGOs are able to survive without international donor grants. Overall, prospects for sustainability in the Tajik NGO sector are very low. Service fees cannot provide enough income, because of the utter destitution of the population.

ADVOCACY: 5.0

NGOs have been somewhat successful in influencing public policy in social sector legislation such as registration procedures for NGOs and government gender policy. Local authorities are in close contact with NGOs and usually respond to the needs of NGOs by providing free premises, contributing to their project activities, etc. Coalitions sometimes form among NGOs, especially women's NGOs. They are mostly issue-based. No long-term coalitions exist in Tajikistan.

Discussions are underway to establish an NGO forum for the expression and protection of common interests. Legal NGOs are more accustomed to working with local and central authorities, and have initiated public discussions with the government. This is despite the fact that there is no law asserting the right of NGOs to take part in political activities or in public life. At the same time, some NGOs are reluctant to become involved in politics.

SERVICE PROVISION: 5.0

NGOs are often effective in providing basic social services, but can not afford the research projects and surveys necessary to determine their constituencies' most urgent problems and needs. As a result international donors determine activities, services and areas of focus.

The degree of duplication of services among NGOs is high. Many organizations try to design their proposals to match the priority spheres of potential donors, and their projects usually are limited to holding numerous seminars

and conferences. This results in a very low opinion of their work by their constituencies, because such activities have very limited impact and are not visible to the general public.

The inefficiency of Tajikistan's banking system limits NGOs' ability to provide services to the population. Cost recovery, for example, is minimal because of the inability of potential buyers (in both

public and private sectors) to pay for their services. Still, the range of services and goods provided by NGOs is increasing.

Some local authorities are beginning to appreciate the role of NGOs involving social sector programs. The central government is generally reluctant and non-cooperative regarding NGOs.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 4.8

Five Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs) have now opened in Tajikistan, serving different regions of the country. These centers offer training, organizational development assistance, information and technical support to local NGOs. During the past year, for the first time, the CSSCs took steps toward coordinating their activities in a nationwide network. Communication among NGOs, and access to information technology has increased as a result of the cooperation of these Centers. Clearly, however, work needs to be done to advertise the work of the CSSCs and other resource centers, as many NGOs remain poorly informed about their existence and the services and support that they make available.

Resource centers outside of major cities do not often provide adequate access to information, technology and new methodologies. Their services should be better targeted, delivered and promoted.

There are no local grant-making organizations, and often NGOs subsist on

grants that continue previous activities, leading to a degree of programmatic inertia. NGOs maintain information exchanges, and there is an active network to support this exchange through electronic mail and printed documents. Links among NGOs are very weak but there is increased appreciation that coalitions are important, not only to facilitate the search for grants, but also to protect NGOs from interference from the state.

There is substantial need for NGO training. There are few available sources for basic training, despite the high demand. NGOs are forced to travel to Russia or Kyrgyzstan for available training session.

In general the media is not interested in cooperating with NGOs, or in publishing information related to them. State restrictions on information dissemination and/or reporting by the media continue to be a problem, especially for NGOs whose activities are perceived to be political in nature.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 5.0

Government-run mass media outlets do not cooperate with NGOs, though independent media do maintain limited

commercial relations with them. To improve public perceptions of the sector, NGOs need trained press officers to

TAJIKISTAN

work with independent media and create a more positive image. They do not however possess the strategy or planning skills necessary to positively interact with the media.

Public perception of NGOs is primarily negative, and based upon limited information, understanding and experience. Those individuals who are direct beneficiaries of NGO services have much more positive perceptions, but it has been estimated that ten percent of beneficiaries still view NGOs as implementing organizations for foreign agencies. The concept of "non-governmental organizations" is still new and unfamiliar

to the Tajik general public, and the poor performance of many NGOs does not help to improve and strengthen the image of the sector.

Few NGOs have developed a Code of Ethics, and most believe that publishing their annual activity or financial reports is not possible for security and economic reasons, since it may invite scrutiny from state organs, tax authorities, or even informal armed groups. To improve cooperation, greater transparency and openness is needed in relations among NGOs.